

THE STAR OF EMPIRE¹

By EUGENE MANLOVE RHODES

THE artist had been doing the larger aspects of Elephant Butte Dam to illumine the text of Our Special Correspondent. Awaiting now, in Dundee, the dateless return of O. S. C., he set up his easel before a gray and seamed *adobe*, once the Bar Cross headquarters—last relic of prehistoric Dundee, the “cow town” of the days before the big dam. The battered old house drew him irresistibly with its look of secrecy, retrospection: the same haunting lure of history withheld that had once compelled him from the hulk of a nameless wreck, high-stranded in the sands by Guaymas.

It was a rambling, flat-roofed building, thick-walled and substantial, degraded now to a warehouse and marked for present demolition. By a lively irony it was to be replaced, of all things, by an armory. Even in its present low estate it preserved a dignity in keeping with the surrounding desert, which was somewhat lacking in its prosperous bourgeois neighbors. It had an inviting and

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hospitable look, heightened by an unassuming comfortable gallery, overshadowed by a patriarchal cottonwood, once a goal far seen across the plain. The roof-high windows, broad and candid, revealed the wide, long rooms, the deep fireplace, the beamed, high ceiling. A dwelling for use and comfort, to live in and not to look at, built on so generous and prodigal a scale as to foster the artist's fancy that it had been fashioned of old for a race of careless giants.

Further yet his dreaming led him. It cleared away box and bale; it rekindled a flame on the broad hearth; it repeopled the cheerful, firelit spaces of the great room with the resolute Titans of his fancy, returned from exile to revisit the pale glimpses of the moon.

On this reverie the workaday world broke harshly, a goodly part of prosperous Dundee pausing on its business way to express variously a unanimous amaze. Why did the artist lavish time and talent on the one blemish of their otherwise blameless city? Why, they inquired, did he not rather turn his attention to Burlingame Avenue—of tinted villas, gabled, turreted, dormered, porticoed, filigreed, beshingled and bestained? Further, they took it as a personal affront that the artist had willfully omitted all modern environment whatsoever, restoring the infinite recession of desert, its limitless, bare horizons.

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To all these the artist, a petulant person, made replies ever more waspish, so that the citizenry presently went its commercial way, leaving him, as sole adviser, a silently-enthralled person of six, Little Lord Fauntleroy to the last curl. Nevertheless, as this small person dug his ankle with a neatly-shod foot, casting furtive, sidelong glances at the unconscious artist, his resemblance to the common or garden boy was startling.

Vainly the artist strove to recall the lost vision. Failing, he began to rough in the tall yucca in the foreground, at the same time becoming aware of his one faithful adherent. The boy sucked in his breath, entranced to see the yucca shape and grow under the swift strokes.

“My! Isn’t it a big one?” he ventured at last, wriggling with admiration. “It’s twenty-eight years old.”

“How do you know?”

“A man told me so. A man at the Armendaris Hotel. With a big red mustache. He planted it. And fenced it in so’s cattle couldn’t eat the stalk. When it was only so high. He told me about when he used to live here. I wish it was then, now.”

“I wish it was then, now,” said the artist sympathetically. “Or that it was now, then. But it’s much better for the real-estate business for it to be now, now.” He scraped diligently at an offending line. “Were you thinking of being a cowboy?”

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The boy extended his researches almost to his knee. His foot was now apparently quite dislocated. He peeped shyly through fringed lashes. Then, finding the artist's smile friendly and disarming:

"I'd like to. Or a brakeman. Or a painter like you. So I could paint Agnes Pauline."

"Ah, yes! Is Agnes Pauline your sweetheart?"

The eyes opened to their widest—gleeful, dancing eyes. He laughed derisively. "Sweetheart? Huh! She's my Jersey calf. 'Most a year old—and just as pretty!"

The artist considered gravely. "I very much need a boy to help me carry my easel—and—and do errands," he finished vaguely. He regarded the boy thoughtfully. "I might do Agnes Pauline for you if we could agree on terms. I usually get fifteen cents an hour, but I'll make it ten to you—taking my pay in errands at a fair price—if we can arrange the sittings for afternoons between two and three. Would that hour suit you?"

"Oh, yes!" said the boy eagerly.

"All right, sport, we'll call it a bargain. Show me where you live and then you can begin by taking the easel to the hotel while I carry the picture."



"The best town in New Mexico by a dam site!" said Hiram Yoast enthusiastically. "Four years

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old, fifteen hundred population, electric lights, telephones, high-pressure water, fire department, automobile stage line to the Dam and the Hot Springs and another through Palomas Gap, national bank, opera house, sanitarium, railroad hospital, fine hotels, soap factory, big brick business blocks, churches, high school, beautiful homes, six miles of concrete walk—and just beginning to grow. I tell you, Dundee has a great future! Perfect climate; soil will grow anything, with water. When it gets here—”

For completion he waved his hand over the grounds of the Armendaris, where grew all manner of fruit trees, interspersed with lawns and flower-beds, bordered with trees of mushroom growth: the whole serving the double purpose of decoration and of advertising what the soil would do—with water. It may be said, in passing, that the Armendaris Hotel was owned and operated by the Armendaris Land and Realty Company, owners also of the Armendaris Land Grant and the townsite of Dundee.

Hiram Yoast had the prosperous appearance common to the burghers of Dundee. His once red mustache was grizzly-tawny; the thick mop of once red hair was gray. His feet were preposterously small and his hatbrim preposterously wide; worn, moreover, at a heterodox angle. His auditor was an elderly stranger of quiet and conventional ap-

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pearance, who had caused much mirth in the Armendaris by registering as "John Doe."

"I thought the town was older than that," said John Doe.

"Of course, there was a station here before," said Hiram. "A store and post-office, a hotel and one dwelling-house. That's all. Just headquarters for a few scattered ranchers till four years ago."

"And the ranchers, the old-timers—where are they?"

"Gone. Some are in Heaven and some in New York. Scattered. California. Arizona. In the Mesilla Valley under the big ditch. Bob Martin is in Albuquerque, banker and Senator from Bernallillo County. But there's only two of the old gang left here now. Frank Bojorquez—sheriff—and me. And I'm going to-night, for keeps."

"Why didn't they stay?" said Mr. John Doe languidly. "Or, to be consistent, why don't *you* stay?"

Hiram ran a thoughtful hand through his mane. "I'll tell you," he said. "The first of all was when old man Baldwin—he's dead now—bought out the Bar Cross—"

"I *beg* your pardon," said the stranger. "Bought out the what?"

"The Bar Cross Cattle Company. He shipped out thirty thousand head, bought a few Chihuahuas to be growin' while the range picked up, and

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showed us how to build dirt tanks. Reservoirs to catch rainwater," he added, forestalling query. "He only built 'em for watering cattle, but they were the beginning of troub—of progress. To get water for irrigation was just a matter of buildin' bigger. A few of us took to farmin' a little for our own use. And then the nesters—the grangers—began to come, with a little expensive water from deep wells and a good deal of dry farmin'. Another thing. You see, them thirty thousand head had held the Jornado for the company——"

"The Jornado?" echoed Mr. John Doe, puzzled. "Excuse me, but what is the Jornado?"

"The desert. That is, not the desert exactly, but the *name* of the desert. The Jornado del Muerto—the Journey of the Dead Man."

"I see," murmured Mr. John Doe. "Sorry to interrupt. I have to do it to understand the facts."

Hiram resumed: "'Twas a mighty big range—one hundred miles by fifty. But that many cattle was all it would run, and the company didn't really own but a few watering places. There wasn't much temptation for newcomers on a crowded range. Once they was shipped out we all began grabbing the springs and lakes, and some of our old friendships went kerflummux. 'Twas like what Frank John told me about the break-up of the Holy Roman Empire—a lot of little states always scrappin' with each other.

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“Next, the railroad fenced the track from Rincon to San Marcial. The Grant had done fenced us on the north before. That made it bad. The little twelve-mile strip between the fence and Caballos Mountain was soon eat out, and there they was. All the grass out the east of the fence and all the water on the west except Aleman and Six Mile, both belonging to Baldwin. They began to go. Some sold to nesters, some just moved, and some stayed so long they had nothin’ to move. And the San Andres was all taken with goats, except the Moongate country. There wasn’t but one water-hole there, and the man wouldn’t let that go.

“Last comes the Elephant Butte Dam. Biggest in the world. It’ll make a lake one hundred and eighty feet deep and back water up for forty miles, when it’s done. And nine-tenths of the lake will be on the Armendaris Land Grant.

“Naturally, the Grant people found out that its river land was mighty valuable. They put up a big, steady howl to the Government. Finally, for damages, they got concessions to put in big pumping stations at the high-water mark, where it backs up McRae Creek, with an everlasting right to pump so many thousand inches a day over the ridge to the Jornado.

“The rest is easy. Water’s sure gold—when it comes. Waitin’ for the dam to build they organized the townsite company and put in a temp’rary

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pumping plant at the Rio Grande for town water and shade trees along the streets. They laid out the park and put in a few fields and orchards just to show what could be done—and advertised. This town is built on faith, hope and first mortgages.

“They got the Panhandle cut off Socorro County and tacked on to Sierra, and built a thirty-thousand-dollar wagonroad through Palomas Gap, where they’ve got copper mines. The county seat was at Hillsboro, off the railroad. They got it moved here by replacin’ the court-house and jail free of charge to taxpayers. Then they advertised some more.

“The railroad done its part. They always had a pumping plant on a six-hour schedule at Muerto Spring, to keep their trains movin’. They put it to doing thirty-six hours a day, built a park, a new depot, a railroad hospital, got the sanitarium to locate here, ran homeseekers’ excursions—and advertised. Best of all, they got capital to come here and start the Jornado Soap Factory. Best soap in the world, and ten million tons of raw soapweed in sight. Make paper from the fiber and roofing material as a by-product. I’m in it.

“So, here we are. Land with water rights selling for three hundred dollars an acre, town lots in proportion. That’s the way I got mine. I believed in it, sold out my stuff, bought land cheap and sold it——”

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“Dear?” interrupted Mr. John Doe cynically.

“Reasonable,” said Hiram warmly. “This kind of farming is better than a device where you can bet on the weather. You can set your rain like an alarm clock, six months ahead, and have it go off on time to the dot.”

“Well, say—I don’t want to be inquisitive, but—why don’t you stay?” insisted Mr. John Doe.

Hiram’s face wore a perplexed and weary look. “I miss the boys,” he said gropingly. “I’m lonely here with so many folks. They’re right good people, but they’re . . . different. When I think of the good old times——! We was a picked bunch, I tell you. The desert cut back the culls. We’ve made our mark. Even them that went wild went wild big. The Bar Cross furnished range bosses, sheriffs and crackopers and riders for half New Mexico and Arizona. Most of ‘em done well, too. There’s Burt Mossman. Up in Dakota now, worth less’n a million.” He began to chuckle. “I’ll never forget the time somebody shot through the window at him one night at the Toby ranch. The bullet smashed the lamp right at Burt’s head. Burt looked round and said——” He paused for another chuckle.

Accurately, John Doe finished the sentence. “And Mossman said: ‘I wish I knew who did that. I bet I’d make him pay for that window!’ ”

Hiram Yoast gazed at Mr. John Doe silently

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and long. Then he arose, lifted Mr. Doe by the collar and deliberately kicked him. "Why, you old fool!" he said affectionately. "Twenty years! How did you get the kink out of your nose? You derned old skunk! Writin' books—and plays! You always was a good offhand liar, but I didn't look to see you be a professional. Livin' in New York City, are you?"

"No. I'm farming," said Mr. John Doe sadly and shamefacedly. "I've sold my copyright for a mess of potash. Never mind me. Come to my room and tell me all about the boys."

On the way he ordered wet liquors. These arriving, they stood up.

"Wherever they are!" said Hiram Yoast.

"Wherever they are!"

Cole, Dallas, Charley, Cal? Scattered. Summerford? Dead. Billy? Dead. McCleod? Dead. Dana, John, Lon, Hartley? Scattered; gone. Emil, Jacky, Thorgood?

* * * *

The sun was nearly down. They started for the depot with full and good intent to board the El Paso train. It was not to be.

By the Bar Cross house the artist was hard at work painting "The Start." Before his easel three ancient cowponies (friends of Hiram's), groomed to a gloss their happier days had never known,

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posed in mournful attitudes. Two were saddled complete, with coiled rope and branding iron at the horn; hitched, after the manner of all good cow-ponies, on honor, with dangling reins.

There were models human as well as equine; two men, painfully belted and spurred and cuffed and leggined. They stood, foot to pack, frozen in the act of cinching a bed on poor Guy, most unhappy ex-cutting horse; who felt the humiliation keenly, drooping his head in resignation, groaning, rolling a despairing white eye.

“Oh, these Montgomery Ward cowboys!” said Hiram acidulously. “*That* ain’t the way to throw a diamond hitch. Look here!” He made cunning readjustment. “You don’t use it on just a bed, no-how. Get ’round there, Foamy, and we’ll show ’em the N hitch.”

The artist laid down brush and palette. Evidently, this was the real thing. He awaited developments with interest. It appeared that Mr. John Doe was “Foamy.” They moved with a brisk vigor, a cheerful snap and precision at variance with their sedate and dignified appearance. That done, Hiram gave his hat a debonair tilt and looked for more worlds to conquer. His accusing finger fell on a tightly-drawn gunbelt.

“What’s that—a corset?” he jeered. “That ain’t no way to wear a gun.” Removing the offending

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property he buckled it on, loosely, so that the gun hung low on his thigh. "Like that. Then you can get your field-piece quick when you need action." An impish look came to his face. "Suppose, now, that can——"

The gun was drawn, cocked. But a tin can, in well-ordered, swept and garnished Dundee, was unthinkable anachronism. The neatly-policed street smote Hiram's eye and brought him very suddenly back to the harsh reality.

It was too much. The gun barked thrice; on the near telephone pole as many insulators splintered to tinkling fragments; a severed wire curled on the sidewalk. The street windows blossomed with craning necks. Littleman and Rebel cocked their ears aslant; even the melancholy Guy looked up hopefully.

The artist spake aside to Mr. John Doe. "You two were cowpunchers?"

"Sure thing!" Mr. Doe jerked his head at the old *adobe*, "We were Bar Cross men!" In such chesty tones Saul of Tarsus proclaimed his nativity of no mean city.

"Thought so. Your name isn't really John Doe?"

The other shook his head. "My right name is O. B. Joyful," he said, and mildly divested the second near-cowboy of his artillery.

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"I see," said the artist. "Go it!" Lighting a cigarette, he assumed the attitude of a disinterested observer.

Hiram had picked up the writhing wire and now held it to his ear, wearing the mischievous look of a benign and elderly goblin.

"Hello, Central! Give me Heaven! . . . Hiram Yoast. . . . Is the barbed-wire man there? . . . Wrong number? . . . Yes—oh, yes! . . . Good-by!"

He glanced around. Mr. John Doe gathered reins and cheekpiece of Rebel's bridle in his left hand, swung lightly to the saddle and raked his thumbs down the astonished Rebel's neck.

Rebel did a gruesome combination of bawl and scream, pitching as joyously as his poor old joints would permit. Mr. John Doe leaned precariously over and fanned the rebellious brow with a sedate derby. "Once in the saddle I used to go dashing, Once in the saddle I used to go gay," he chanted sprightly. "Lil-la-lee-li-lee-HOO!" The pitching ceased, and Rebel, much refreshed, went strutting proudly off.

With a reassuring nod and a friendly, wagging finger for the contemplative artist Hiram grabbed at Guy's neck-rope and followed on a ridiculous Littleman, who arched his venerable neck and pranced mettlesome before high heaven. Despite the ignominious pack, Guy seemed to have recovered

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a measure of self-respect. Pricking his ears, ignoring the lead-rope, he trotted jauntily alongside, nose to stirrup.

The train was coming. Far to northward its tiny feather of smoke rose over the long ridges. The escapade might well have ended at the depot had it not been for the portrait of Agnes Pauline. For after the sitting Agnes Pauline had been insecurely fastened, after the manner of small boys. At this psychological moment she made untimely escape, tore at a gallop across the sprinkled lawn of a terracotta bungalow, stopped with a sudden turf-plowing of forefeet and regarded Mr. John Doe inquiringly, flaunting her velvet ears.

“Ba-a-a?” said Agnes Pauline playfully, and fled hilarious down the show street of Dundee.

“A maverick!” Mr. John Doe’s itching fingers plucked at his rope; the quivering Rebel plunged to frantic, unbidden chase.

Close behind, Hiram tore down the scandalized street, the abandoned packhorse in mad pursuit. Before the courthouse Mr. John Doe’s whirling loop dropped on the luckless Jersey neck. Hiram deftly snared her hindfeet and she was down, stretched out, held by bracing horses standing at attention. Mr. John Doe unbuckled a bridle rein to tie her; Mr. Yoast, with unhesitating directness broke pickets from the courthouse fence for the branding-fire.

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A prominent citizen came puffing down the walk to stentorian expostulation at such wanton outrage. Agnes Pauline, freed from the choking neck-rope, bawled vehemently. Mr. John Doe, irreproachably clad, sat cross-legged and imperturbable in the street, whittling splinters for kindling. Hiram turned to the indignant citizen with an engaging smile. "Do you want I should bite my initials in your neck?" he inquired suavely.

The eminent citizen fell back aghast. Mr. Yoast, his aforetime respected associate in staid and conservative enterprise, had fallen suddenly quite mad! He fled to telephone the sheriff. Simultaneously from the courthouse came an apoplectic constable, to make swift arrest, with injurious verbal flourishes.

Before the terrors of the law thus represented the offenders submitted meekly, after a momentary flicker of eyelashes. Releasing their hapless victim they delivered up their guns. On the corner the citizenry gathered in tittering groups.

"Will you give bail or go to jail?" demanded the constable, thunderously effective.

"No bail. Jail," said Hiram. "Good old jail!"

They preceded him humbly, a pitiable spectacle —two frail and repentant old gentlemen. When the cell was opened, however, they exhibited certain symptoms of lingering waywardness, unexpectedly kicking their captor into the cell, resuming their

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guns and eliciting the keys from the jailer. Mr. John Doe turned the lock and absently jingled the keys in his pocket, heedless of the garrulous constable. Hiram took out a pencil and wrote largely on the outer door:

DUNDEE, NEW MEXICO,
Sept. 3, 1908.

First National Bank of Dundee:

Pay to Francisco Bojorquez, retaining
this check as voucher, money to pay for
what I break.

Not negotiable.

HIRAM YOAST.

He turned affably to the jailer. "Just give that to the sheriff and tell him Hy Yoast said, *Adios, compadre!* And for him to settle any claims. For one thing, there's three horses and some plunder we required from a painter-man. Tell him we're much obliged, will you?"

Curious citizens were coming up the walk. Hiram thoughtfully tossed his pencil in the air, pulled his gun and fired. The pencil vanished; the yeomanry dispersed.

Toe in stirrup, Hiram paused, bright-eyed.

"Where do we make camp? Mescal? The 7
T X?"

"No, no!" said Mr. John Doe thickly. "Not that way. Beyond the fences. To the Free Range!"

"The Moongate, then? All right. 'Yo!—ee—

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yo—o! E-e-e yo-o-o-o! My little dogies! Winter is coming, you're far from your home? Come along, Guy!"

Suddenly John Doe and Rebel darted after a supposititious recalcitrant steer, headed him, swift-wheeling, and brought him back in freakish triumph.

The sun was down. Peace brooded over the earth, save as acrimonious constabular comment floated brokenly from the jail. A spell of wizardry fell upon that cool and quiet street. Slowly, unhurriedly, they rode, deviously urging the drags of a phantasmal herd, with tolerant rope-snappings for laggards. From the upper balcony of an olivé-green villa leaned a roguish young lady, laughing, rose in hand.

"Oh, were you cowboys?" she demanded.

They bared their gray heads. "Madame!" said Hiram Yoast, rising in his stirrups, "we're cowboys now!"

She leaned far over. "You dear old things!" she cooed, and tossed the rose.

To right, to left, the dear old things swooped down to sudden, alarming eclipse, leaving visible hand at saddle-horn, toe at cantle. The young lady screamed faintly. From the "pick-up" Hiram reappeared triumphant, thrust the rose in his buttonhole with an air, and waved gallant farewell to the representative of the lawless sex.

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Mr. John Doe, without looking back, opened his palm. On it lay a few crumpled petals. He watched them till the soft breeze scattered them idly; then rode on, still looking at the empty, passive palm.

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Francisco Bojorquez, the sheriff, rode by the depot just before the six-twenty-eight train drew in, paused for brief hearing of excited reports and trotted easily after the marauders. Grizzled, but hawkfaced and lean and brown, the sheriff; still with the poised alertness of that Bojorquez who had been best roper, boldest rider, of the old days.

He hailed the peacebreakers just beyond the olive-green villa. The lady of the rose watched, wide-eyed. The unabashed culprits turned to him gladly. "Why, hel-lo, Frank! We're carryin' the herd to Moongate in the cool," explained Mr. John Doe. "Can't you side us? We're short-handed. Some of the boys is . . . gone."

The sheriff's eyes rose suddenly to the distant hills. "Sure thing!" he said, and cheerfully fell in beside them. Watching Dundee shuddered to its being's core. Equably, the sheriff flicked his quirt at a dilatory bovine wraith. This accomplished, he lifted his brows at Mr. John Doe.

"Been away, Foamy? Representin' the Bar Cross?" he inquired lightly.

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Representing? A dull wave of color swept to Mr. John Doe's face. Things forgotten, the pettiness, the shifty diplomacies, the compromise, the indirection of the twenty years he had been "away" flashed up to shame him. *Representing? Ah, no!* A Bar Cross man rode straight on what unyielding way he chose, be that way good or evil. "I've had . . . a lay-off," said Mr. John Doe. And this time his humility was sincere and unassumed.

* * * * *

The Honorable Robert Martin, tall, portly and severe, alighted from the six-twenty-eight to a Dundee of unwonted commotion. Two men violently insane! Sunstroke! There goes the sheriff after them! Desperate characters! Bank robbers! Escaped convicts!

The Honorable Robert pushed through the crowd to the accustomed stand of the "Scenic Stage Route," where a 50 H. P. touring-car stood waiting to convey to Elephant Butte Dam the United States mail, the resident engineer in charge, the Honorable Robert and any less-distinguished passengers. The Honorable Robert was just in time to witness the romance of the rose and the subsequent defection of the sheriff.

Near by, a skull-capped youth peered through a spy-glass. This the Honorable Robert silently

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commandeered by right of eminent domain. When he restored it to the indignant owner the Honorable Robert's face was thoughtful. Three Bar Cross boys! Forgetful of years and wealth and dignities the fourth Bar Cross boy sought how he, too, might obtain the freedom of the city.

By a freight depot stood a goat-man's supply wagon, ready loaded for a start betimes in the morning. Thither the auto-stage glided with the Honorable Robert in the chauffeur's seat. Negligently he threw out the mail sacks and began tumbling a various assortment of portable property into the tonneau to the amazed resident engineer. A keg of water, a sack of corn, a saddle, a roll of bedding. "Stow 'em any old way," said the Honorable Robert, calmly, to the resident engineer. "No time to spare." Flour, salt, coffee, bacon, a small chuck-box rattling with tin dishes, a Dutch oven, a coffee-pot.

"I guess that'll be all—oh!" With a beatified countenance he tossed in a bundle of cheap tobacco and cigarette-papers. Politely but unmistakably he ejected the resident engineer. The action excited comment. Men started to run that way. The car circled northward, gathering speed for a running start, turned back, squawking jubilantly. "Honk! Honk!" It rolled resistless through a line of shocked but impotent populace.

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“‘Come, open the Westport,’” caroled this blithesome legislator, “‘and let me go free, make room for the bonnets of Bonnie Dundee!’”

At the corner he slowed down and trundled placidly up the bewitched street, behind the truant adventurers; guiding the car with one hand and with the other cracking an astral whip at the leaders of a phantom team, with florid vocal encouragement.

Such a disconcerting and spectacular climax, this distinguished lawgiver thus stricken and wild, was too much for over-wrought nerves. Staid and orderly Dundee ran around in circles, uttering strange cries. Had the odor left by the departing car been that of sulphur rather than wonted gasoline it could hardly have left more consternation in its wake. Was there to be a reign of terror, a universal brain-storm?

But a few hardy spirits, including the mayor, the resident engineer and the curious artist (who, alone of them all, held the clew) procured another car and started in pursuit. On the outskirts of the town they came in sight of the fugitives, halted where once the Moongate Road bore quartering across the plain, straight to the Pass. Here now lay the Winthrop addition, fenced to protect the young trees along the graded but yet unopened streets.

Hiram and Mr. John Doe relieved Guy of his burden and threw it in the car; the Honorable

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Robert Martin handed something from the car to the sheriff, who rode forward, dismounted and cut the fence. Turning by the gap, Bojorquez saw the pursuing notables and waved his hand to the Honorable Robert. "Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see any one coming?" he shrilled, and went his untroubled way, evidently confident that Sister Anne was equal to the emergency.

Sister Anne turned his head as the mayor's car took the brakes and ground to a stand. The mayor looked at Sister Anne. Sister Anne looked at the mayor. Sister Anne raised an open hand to bar further intrusion. "Go back!" he said dispassionately. His machine passed the gap and chugged stolidly through the violated lots behind the slow horsemen. They did not look back. To the arrested pursuit drifted a mellow refrain of mingled voices:

"Yo—o! Ee-yo-o-o! Go 'long, my little dogies!"

In the deep Pass the hoyden moon sprang radiant. Perhaps it was but her sorcery—or was that indeed the tossing of white horns, the wavy crowding of a spectral herd, gay, ghostly riders on lead and point and swing? Was that the creaking of harness, complaining of axles, borne down the wind where a dim-outlined wagon toiled behind? Slowly they crawled up the low slope, paused on the crest and were gone.

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The resident engineer drew a long breath.
"Midsummer madness," he muttered uneasily.

"Plain drunk!" said the mayor bitterly. "Drunk as boiled owls. Shall we go on?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said the artist. "He said for us to go back."

* * * *

On the morrow the sheriff and the Honorable Robert Martin sat in the lobby of the Armendaris with such serene and untroubled dignity that none ventured to question them. The incident was closed. As for the others, Dundee knew them no more.

The deserted car, woefully smirched and soiled, was found by Lone Cedar in Moongate Pass. Oven and coffee-pot sat by the dead fire; the beds were rolled and tied. In the tall grama a fresh, well-beaten path, littered with cigarette-stubs, made such a broad circle, as in old times, was left where a herd had bedded down; where, two by two, the men of the Bar Cross had stood their last guard.